

National Endowment for the Arts

TEACHER'S GUIDE



HARPER LEE'S

**To Kill a Mockingbird**



NATIONAL  
ENDOWMENT  
FOR THE ARTS



THE **BIG  
READ**

HARPER LEE'S

# To Kill a Mockingbird

TEACHER'S GUIDE



The National Endowment for the Arts is a public agency dedicated to supporting excellence in the arts—both new and established—bringing the arts to all Americans, and providing leadership in arts education. Established by Congress in 1965 as an independent agency of the federal government, the Endowment is the nation's largest annual funder of the arts, bringing great art to all 50 states, including rural areas, inner cities, and military bases.



The Institute of Museum and Library Services is the primary source of federal support for the nation's 122,000 libraries and 17,500 museums. The Institute's mission is to create strong libraries and museums that connect people to information and ideas. The Institute works at the national level and in coordination with state and local organizations to sustain heritage, culture, and knowledge; enhance learning and innovation; and support professional development.



Arts Midwest connects people throughout the Midwest and the world to meaningful arts opportunities, sharing creativity, knowledge, and understanding across boundaries. Based in Minneapolis, Arts Midwest connects the arts to audiences throughout the nine-state region of Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Michigan, Minnesota, North Dakota, Ohio, South Dakota, and Wisconsin. One of six non-profit regional arts organizations in the United States, Arts Midwest's history spans more than 25 years.



The Boeing Company is the world's leading aerospace company. It is the largest manufacturer of satellites, commercial jetliners, and military aircraft. The company is also a global market leader in missile defense, human space flight, launch services, aerospace support services, and homeland security services. As a leading contractor to the U.S. Department of Defense (DoD), Boeing works together with its DoD customers to provide U.S. Armed Forces and U.S. allies around the world with fully integrated high-performing systems solutions and support.

Additional support for the Big Read has also been provided by the W.K. Kellogg Foundation in partnership with Community Foundations of America.

### **Published by**

National Endowment for the Arts  
1100 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.  
Washington, D.C. 20506-0001  
(202) 682-5400

### **Works Cited**

Excerpts from *To Kill a Mockingbird*, Copyright © 1960, 1988 by Harper Lee, are reproduced by permission of HarperCollins Publishers. Production copyright HarperCollins Publishers.

### **Acknowledgements**

Cover portrait: John Sherffius

Writers: Philip Burnham and Sarah Bainter Cunningham for the National Endowment for the Arts.

Graphic Design: Fletcher Design / Washington, D.C.

### **Photo Credits**

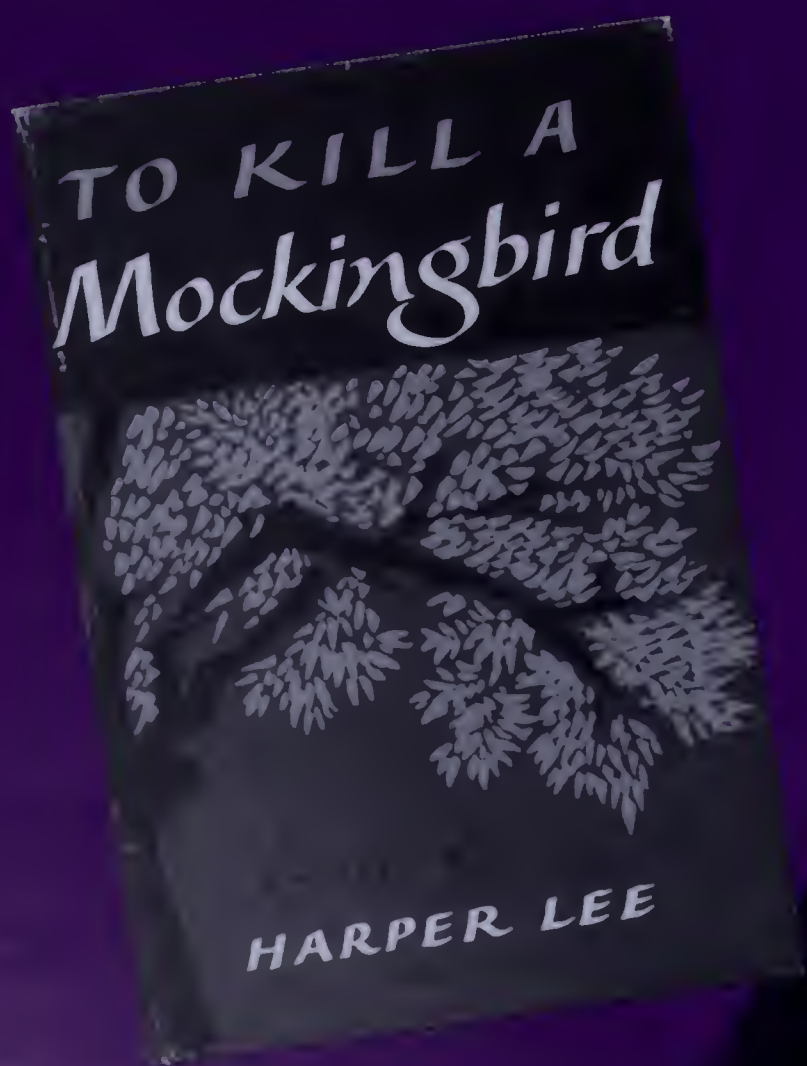
Page iv: *To Kill a Mockingbird* book cover, photograph by John Montgomery, courtesy of HarperCollins; Mockingbird image, Jeremy Woodhouse/Getty Images; **Page 1:** Dana Gioia, photo by Vance Jacobs; **Inside back cover:** Harper Lee, Donald Uhrbrock/Time Life Pictures/Getty Images

# Table of Contents

Introduction .....	1
Suggested Teaching Schedule .....	2
Lesson One: Biography .....	4
Lesson Two: Culture and History .....	5
Lesson Three: Narrative and Point of View.....	6
Lesson Four: Characters .....	7
Lesson Five: Figurative Language .....	8
Lesson Six: Symbols .....	9
Lesson Seven: Character Development .....	10
Lesson Eight: The Plot Unfolds.....	11
Lesson Nine: Themes of the Novel .....	12
Lesson Ten: A Great Novel .....	13
Essay Topics .....	14
Capstone Projects .....	15
Handout One: Harper Lee .....	16
Handout Two: The Great Depression .....	17
Handout Three: The Civil Rights Movement .....	18
Teaching Resources.....	19
NCTE Standards .....	20

“Mockingbirds don’t do one thing but make music for us to enjoy. They don’t eat up other people’s gardens, don’t nest in corncribs, they don’t do one thing but sing their hearts out for us. That’s why it’s a sin to kill a mockingbird.”

—from *To Kill a Mockingbird*



# Introduction

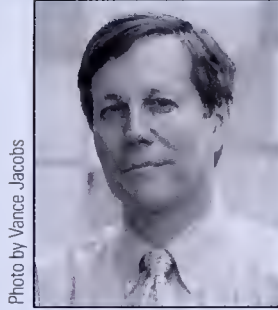


Photo by Vance Jacobs

Welcome to the Big Read, a major initiative from the National Endowment for the Arts. Designed to revitalize the role of literary reading in American culture, the Big Read hopes to unite communities through great literature, as well as inspire students to become life-long readers.

This Big Read Teacher's Guide contains ten lessons to lead you through Harper Lee's classic novel, *To Kill a Mockingbird*. Each lesson has four sections: a thematic focus, discussion activities, writing exercises, and homework assignments. In addition, we have provided suggested essay topics and capstone projects, as well as handouts with more background information about the novel, the historical period, and the author. All lessons dovetail with the state language arts standards required in the fiction genre.

The Big Read teaching materials also include a CD. Packed with interviews, commentaries, and excerpts from the novel, the Big Read CD presents first-hand accounts of why Lee's novel remains so compelling four decades after its initial publication. Some of America's most celebrated writers, scholars, and actors have volunteered their time to make these Big Read CDs exciting additions to the classroom.

Finally, the Big Read Reader's Guide deepens your exploration with interviews, booklists, time lines, and historical information. We hope this guide and syllabus allow you to have fun with your students while introducing them to the work of a great American author.

From the NEA, we wish you an exciting and productive school year.

A handwritten signature in dark ink that reads "Dana Gioia". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Dana" and last name "Gioia" clearly distinguishable.

Dana Gioia  
Chairman, National Endowment for the Arts

# Suggested Teaching Schedule

## 1

### Day One

FOCUS: Biography

Activities: Listen to the Big Read CD, Track One (15:45). Read Reader's Guide essays. Respond to the novel's epigraph by Charles Lamb.

Homework: Chapter 1-3 (pp. 3-32).\*

## 2

### Day Two

FOCUS: Arts and Culture

Activities: Listen to the Big Read CD, Track Two (13:14). Read Handout Two. Read Reader's Guide essay, "Historical Context: The Jim Crow South" (pp. 8-9). Write about the relation between history and the novel.

Homework: Chapters 4-7 (pp. 32-63).

## 3

### Day Three

FOCUS: Narrative and Point of View

Activities: Explore Scout's narration. Imagine the novel narrated by Dill. Write the first pages of Dill's book. Write in first person from Boo Radley's point of view.

Homework: Chapters 8-11 (pp. 63-99).

## 4

### Day Four

FOCUS: Characters

Activities: Explore the protagonist and antagonist. Examine minor characters that serve as foils. Write about the antagonist.

Homework: Chapter 12 (pp. 99-126).

## 5

### Day Five

FOCUS: Figurative Language

Activities: Review the novel identifying instances of figurative language. Write a personal story using techniques of image, simile, metaphor, and analogy.

Homework: Chapters 13-15 (pp. 127-155).

\*Page numbers refer to the Warner Books 1982 edition of *To Kill a Mockingbird*.

## 6

### Day Six

FOCUS: Symbols

Activities: Discuss the mockingbird as a symbol in the novel. Write about how the names of characters serve as symbols.

Homework: Chapters 16-18 (pp. 155-189).

## 7

### Day Seven

FOCUS: Character Development

Activities: Explore how the characters change their beliefs within the story. Write about the hero of the novel.

Homework: Chapters 19-24 (pp. 190-227).

## 8

### Day Eight

FOCUS: The Plot Unfolds

Activities: Chart a time line of the story. Develop a plot for the sequel.

Homework: Chapters 25-27 (pp. 227-254).

## 9

### Day Nine

FOCUS: Themes of the Novel

Activities: Explore potential themes. Develop an interpretation based on one of the themes.

Homework: Chapters 28-31 (pp. 254-281).  
Begin essay.

## 10

### Day Ten

FOCUS: A Great Novel

Activities: Explore the qualities of a great novel and a voice of a generation. Examine qualities that make Lee's novel successful. Peer review of paper outlines or drafts.

Homework: Essay due next class period.

# 1

## Lesson One

### FOCUS: Biography

The author's life can inform and expand the reader's understanding of a novel. Some events in the novel mirror circumstances in Harper Lee's life. In *To Kill a Mockingbird*, Lee infuses the adventure with her experience as a lawyer's daughter and a tomboy growing up in the South. Although a work of fiction, the novel reflects a small Southern town during the Great Depression. And while we more fully understand the book as we learn about the author, the artistry of the novel does not succeed or fail based on the author's life. The novel—a work of art—has an internal structure independent of the author's personality.



### Discussion Activities

Listen to the Big Read CD, Track One (15:45). Students should take notes as they listen. What do the students learn about Harper Lee from her biographer, Charles J. Shields and other contributors? What are the three most important points on the CD?

Copy Reader's Guide essays, "Harper Lee" (pp. 4-5) (or Handout One in this Teacher's Guide), "The Friendship of Harper Lee and Truman Capote" (pp. 6-7) and "How *To Kill A Mockingbird* Came To Be Written" (pp. 10-11). Divide the class into groups. Assign one essay to each group. After reading and discussing the essays, each group will present what they learned from the essay. Ask students to add a creative twist to make their presentation memorable.



### Writing Exercise

The novel begins with an epigraph by Charles Lamb: "Lawyers, I suppose, were children once." Based on what you've learned from the CD, why do you think Lee chose this quote to begin her novel? Write two paragraphs on how this statement relates to what students have learned about Lee's life.



### Homework

Read Chapters 1-3 (pp. 3-32). Prepare your students to read approximately 30 pages per night in order to complete this book in ten lessons. What happens to Scout on her first day of school? What kind of teacher is Miss Caroline, Scout's first grade teacher?

## Lesson Two

### FOCUS: Culture and History

*To Kill a Mockingbird* is set in the mid-1930s during the Great Depression. Throughout the decade, jobs were scarce, bread lines were long, and movies cost only a nickel—a time that left an indelible impression on the young Harper Lee.

Culturally, the swing era, movies, and radio drama were the talk of the nation. Writers such as F. Scott Fitzgerald chronicled the lives of the rich and famous, while writers such as John Steinbeck recounted the tale of America's downtrodden. Women could vote, and the prohibition of alcohol was finally repealed. Government programs such as the Works Progress Administration and Social Security were established. But some things endured even the chaos of economic depression. Jim Crow laws continued to prevent African Americans from enjoying equal rights with other citizens, even if the Old South seemed to be slowly changing.



### Discussion Activities

Listen to the Big Read CD, Track Two (13:14). Based on the CD, why does former Justice Sandra Day O'Connor say that Atticus "represents the best of the legal profession"? According to O'Connor, how might "the idea of justice pervade everything"? Have you seen any indicators of this in your first reading assignment?

Go to NEA's Jazz in the Schools Web site at [www.neajazzintheschools.org](http://www.neajazzintheschools.org). Click on "Listen" and scroll down to Billie Holiday's 1939 "Strange Fruit," a description of the Southern practice of lynching. Play the music of Duke Ellington and Louis Armstrong. This music crossed the racial boundaries drawing audiences from all walks of life. If you have additional time, you can teach Lesson Two of the NEA Jazz in the Schools curriculum covering the decades before and after the Great Depression.



### Writing Exercise

Copy Handout Two. Copy Reader's Guide essay, "Historical Context: The Jim Crow South" (pp. 8-9). Have students read these brief essays and write a one-page, in-class essay on how the book reflects historical realities.



### Homework

Read Chapters 4-7 (pp. 32-63). What role does reading play in Maycomb? Why is Boo Radley such a mystery to Scout, Jem, and Dill? What is the significance of the hole in the tree?

## Lesson Three

### FOCUS: Narrative and Point of View

First-person narration draws the reader into the perspective of the main character, as this person tells us, first-hand, about their experiences. This person uses the first-person, “I”, to draw us through her/his adventures. A first-person narrator is personally invested in how the drama unfolds.

Third-person narration uses “he” or “she” to tell the story from another point of view. Third-person narration establishes a greater distance between narrator and audience, as an outside observer relates events. Since this outside observer does not appear to participate directly in or affect the events of the story, this narrator seems to relay the drama objectively. A third-person narrator may or may not be omniscient. An omniscient third-person narrator knows the thoughts and movements of every character.

*To Kill a Mockingbird* is told in first person by Jean Louise “Scout” Finch. The novel begins from the point of view of the adult Scout, as she looks back on her childhood. Through the filter of her adult experience, she revisits her memories that, though long ago passed, have a life of their own.

### Discussion Activities

Why might Harper Lee tell the story from an adult perspective, narrated many years after the fact? In the first seven chapters, can you find statements that remind us of an adult point of view? Or does the adult narrator enter completely into the world of her childhood?

How would this story be narrated, in the third-person, from the point of view of Dill’s fabulous imagination? Have the class brainstorm the outline of a new version of the novel told from this perspective.

### Writing Exercise

Based on the previous activity, write a few pages of Dill’s version of the story based on the first seven chapters.

Begin another version of the novel told in first-person from Boo Radley’s perspective. How would Boo Radley describe Jem, Scout, and Dill?

### Homework

Read Chapters 8-11 (pp. 63-99). Going through the first 99 pages, how many characters have been introduced? Which are primary? What motivates the primary characters?

# 4

## Lesson Four

### FOCUS: Characters

The main character in a work of literature is called the “protagonist.” The protagonist usually overcomes a weakness to achieve a new understanding by the work’s end. A protagonist who acts with great courage and strength may be called a “hero.” The protagonist’s journey is made more dramatic by challenges presented by characters with different beliefs or perspectives. A “foil” provokes or challenges the protagonist in profound ways. The most important foil, the “antagonist,” opposes the protagonist, barring or complicating his or her fulfillment.

#### Discussion Activities

Who is the protagonist in the novel? Who is the antagonist? How does their opposition to one another help develop the drama and the unfolding of the tale?

Divide the class into groups to examine the role of “foils” in the novel. Assign each group two secondary characters: Calpurnia, Boo Radley, Tom Robinson, Miss Maudie, Aunt Alexandra, Uncle Jack, Francis, or Miss Caroline. Ask students to review the first 99 pages of the novel. Have each group list key attributes of their character. Prepare a presentation that documents moments when these characters bring out reactions from Scout. How do their unique personalities help Scout learn about herself?

#### Writing Exercise

Write two pages on the character that you believe to be the antagonist. If Scout is our protagonist, why is this character opposed to her? How is this character forcing her to look at herself in profound ways? What passages from the text support your conclusions?

#### Homework

Read Chapter 12 (pp. 99-126). Find the three most vivid descriptions in Chapter 12. Are they effective? Why or why not? What do Jem and Scout learn from Mrs. Dubose and going to church with Calpurnia in this section?

## Lesson Five

### FOCUS: Figurative Language

Writers commonly use stylistic devices that require a leap of faith by the reader. Such tools allow readers to visualize events, whether through an unexpected image, an idea, or an observation. The most common literary devices are image, simile, and metaphor. Use these terms to identify the novel's figurative language to expand the meaning of the novel.

**Image:** a vivid representation or description.

**Simile:** a comparison between two things using “like” or “as.”

**Metaphor:** a comparison in which one thing is figuratively transformed so as to reveal its essence.



### Discussion Activities

Divide the class into groups. Assign each group a selection of chapters (1-4, 5-8, or 9-12), asking them to identify figurative language used in those chapters. They should specifically identify images, similes, and metaphors. In those chapters, how does the figurative language assist in telling the story? Have groups present their findings to the class.

Once you have collected some evidence from the novel reflect on whether some of the figures should be taken literally. What clues help a reader know when the author uses words figuratively? Can you find these clues in the novel?



### Writing Exercise

Find an image in the text. Expand the image by turning it into a simile. For example, Lee expands an ordinary image with a simile: “she did give Jem a hot biscuit-and-butter...it tasted like cotton” (p. 103).

Have students write a few paragraphs telling a story about an important childhood event. In their story, students should use image, simile, and metaphor at least twice. Can they see how developing figurative language in a story contributes to the artistry of the novel?



### Homework

Read Chapters 13-15 (pp. 127-155). What might Mrs. Dubose symbolize? Aunt Alexandra believes the “Finch Family” captures or symbolizes certain values. What does she think this family symbolizes? How does Scout fit into this image?

## Lesson Six

### FOCUS: Symbols

Harper Lee uses images and characters to stand for something above and beyond what they represent at first reading. These symbols have special importance — they are interpretive keys to the text.

As a form of figurative language, symbols can maintain our fascination by hinting beyond the literal, drawing us into the story, and asking us to explore the author's intentions. Frequently, study of the specific characteristics of the symbol will shed light on the entire story. For example, Atticus is named for a leader from ancient Greece. Independent research on the original Atticus will open doors to a deeper understanding of Lee's Atticus.

The very names of Maycomb's residents symbolize something about their nature. Mr. Underwood confines himself to a dark office, and Robert E. Lee Ewell may be the antithesis of his Civil War namesake.

### Discussion Activities

The only time Atticus describes “sin” to his children, he advises Scout and Jem to avoid shooting mockingbirds. Why does the mockingbird (p. 90) become a central symbol of the novel? How does this warning relate to the other events of the story? How does exploration of the mockingbird shed light on other elements of the story?

To further explore this topic, have students do extra research on mockingbirds. Do mockingbirds have other natural features that relate to the story?

### Writing Exercise

In Chapter 15, the drama mounts as Atticus is surrounded by a group of men. How does Scout defuse the potentially violent confrontation? Would you have expected this? Was it convincing that Scout could defuse such tension? Why or why not?

Choose a character whose name serves a symbolic function. Explain how the name as a symbol relates to the real person. Does the person reflect his or her namesake or contradict his or her namesake? Why has Lee depicted them this way?

### Homework

Read Chapters 16-18 (pp. 155-189). Read Handout Three. In the first 18 chapters, how have Jem, Scout, and Dill changed? Are these profound changes or just a result of growing up?

## Lesson Seven

### FOCUS: Character Development

The protagonist gradually undergoes a profound change of heart. The protagonist's shortcomings fundamentally affect the manner in which s/he is able to respond to the challenge brought by outside forces. While some changes begin from outside forces, changes also brew within thoughts and emotions as our hero searches to overcome his/her deepest fears, realize his/her dreams, or discover his/her identity.

This novel explores human nature, equality, and justice through the trial of Tom Robinson. A child's inexperience captures an innocent sense of justice, while an adult's world-weariness leads to abandoning the fight for justice. As a result, this novel hinges on occasions in which adults act like children and children act like adults. In order to argue for racial equality, Lee must demonstrate situations in which narrow-minded prejudice can realistically yield to an expanded moral sensibility.



### Discussion Activities

Which characters in the story are beginning to change their views? In what ways do they change their views? Choose one of the child characters and one of the adult characters to focus your discussion.

Will Atticus still win the trial if he only succeeds in convincing a number of Maycomb citizens of Robinson's innocence? Does he fail if he cannot convince the whole jury? Will it be unrealistic if he is able to convince the jury?

Do the main characters reflect the tensions of the Civil Rights movement? How?



### Writing Exercise

On what occasions do you wish a character might have acted more maturely? Why or why not? On what occasions were you surprised that a character acted very maturely? Why or why not? Explain how you would define "mature."

Early in the novel, Scout says, "Jem was a born hero" (p. 44). Have students write a paragraph explaining who is the most heroic character of *To Kill a Mockingbird*. Is it Jem? Is it Atticus? Scout? Tom Robinson? Or is it perhaps Boo Radley? Make sure you define "hero."



### Homework

Read Chapters 19-24 (pp. 190-227). Ask students to reflect on how Lee has constructed the plot to reach this dramatic conclusion. Come to class with the two most important turning points in the novel.

## Lesson Eight

### FOCUS: The Plot Unfolds

A novel's plot unfolds a series of events leading to a dramatic climax. The timing of such events can make a novel predictable or riveting. Lee makes deliberate choices about how to structure and pace events to tell a coming-of-age story that speaks to all generations. In this lesson, map the events of the story to assess the artistry of story-telling.

*To Kill a Mockingbird* begins as a story about curiosity, sibling adventures, and the first school days. The novel evolves into a saga about criminal justice, legal representation, and deep-rooted Southern values. All the events lead to the final, tragic event: Tom Robinson's guilty verdict. At this tragic moment, Jem forsakes "background" in exchange for how long his family has "been readin' and writin'" (p. 227). He believes that literacy allows the Finches to rise above prejudice, while illiteracy sinks the Cunninghams into a moral quagmire. In the face of such injustice, Jem realizes that Boo Radley may want to stay inside to avoid the prejudice and injustice.

#### Discussion Activities

Have students identify the most important turning points in the novel. Ask students to reference the passages from the novel, explaining why these events are the most significant. Use this information for the next activity.

As a class, map a time line that depicts the development of the dramatic build-up from the beginning. This map should include the most significant turning points, but also examine the lesser events that build tension. As students develop their maps, they should define the beginning, middle, and end of the novel.

#### Writing Exercise

Outline a sequel to Lee's novel. How would this plot unfold? How would students map the beginning, middle, and end? Have students write the opening paragraphs to the sequel.

Rewrite the novel's ending as if Tom Robinson was acquitted. If he were acquitted, would the novel be as powerful? Would it be more powerful?

#### Homework

Read Chapters 25-27 (pp. 227-254). Why did Lee choose this title? How is literacy a theme of the novel?

## Lesson Nine

### FOCUS: Themes of the Novel

Lesson One through Lesson Eight should assist the class in developing an interpretation of the novel. The development of characters, the implications of Lee's figurative language, and the unfolding plot contribute to the themes. The themes of a novel explore the meaning of human life. Themes are issues—love, war, freedom, and responsibility—that grab a reader's attention and don't let up.

Use these themes as springboards. Themes should lend to a specific interpretation of the novel. Use the historical references provided to support your ideas. For example, try to decide if the novel is about justice, race, small towns, the South, or coming-of-age.



### Discussion Activities and Writing Exercise



Students can come up with five themes in the novel. Here are some samples:

#### Race

At what points do different characters make remarks about race? At what points do other characters' actions speak louder than their words? Does the novel make a final statement about how race should affect our treatment of others? Does Dolphus Raymond provide us a clue to this question?

#### Justice

Return to Sandra Day O'Connor's statement that the "idea of justice pervades everything" in the novel. What evidence supports or rejects O'Connor's view? If Lee is using the novel to provide us with a definition of justice for the twentieth century, what is her definition? Remember, she published the novel in 1960, during the Civil Rights era.

#### Literacy/Illiteracy

Explore Jem's statement about literacy. Review the novel, noting occasions where reading plays an important role. How is the novel developing an argument about the value of reading? What is more important: the activity of reading or the content within the text?

#### Gender

A tomboy, Scout becomes more feminine as the novel closes. How does Scout battle with her gender role? Does she give a new definition to feminine? How does this relate to the rest of the story? In what ways do Jem and Dill face the same coming-of-age dilemma? Finally, does this reflect the 1930s, 1960s, or both?



### Homework

Read Chapters 28-31 (pp. 254-281). Begin essays, using "Essay Topics" at the end of this guide. Outlines due next class.

## Lesson Ten

### FOCUS: A Great Novel

The topics in this guide reflect the fundamental elements of the novel. The writer's voice, rhythm, and sense of poetry enchant us, providing literary pleasures while making statements about our humanity. The pacing of the novel's plot allows us insight into the tempos of another life. As the protagonist navigates challenges, we are guided through our own adventures by the successes and failures of the central character. Finally, great stories articulate and explore the tensions and conflicts within our daily lives.

#### Discussion Activities

Ask students to make a list of the characteristics of a great book. Put these on the board. What elevates a novel to greatness? Then ask them to discuss, within groups, other books they know that include some of the same characteristics. Do any of these books remind them of *To Kill a Mockingbird*? Is this a great novel?

A great writer can be the voice of a generation. What kind of voice does Lee provide through Scout and the Finch family? What does this voice tell us about the concerns and dreams of her generation? How does this voice represent the era of the Great Depression and Jim Crow?

In response to Ewell's death, what does Scout's concluding comment, "Well, it'd be sorta like shootin' a mockingbird, wouldn't it?" (p. 276) mean? How might Lee's portrayal of Scout, in this scene, make this a great novel?

#### Writing Exercise

If you were the voice of your generation, what would be your most important message? Why might you choose to convey this in a novel rather than a speech or essay? What story would you tell to get your point across?

Have students work on their essays in class. Be available to assist with outlines, drafts, and arguments. Have them partner with another student to edit outlines and/or rough drafts. For this editing, provide students with a list of things they should look for in a well-written essay.

#### Homework

Finish essay. Students will present their paper topics and interpretations to the class. Celebrate by participating in a Big Read community event or show Horton Foote's film version of *To Kill a Mockingbird*.

# Essay Topics

The discussion activities and writing exercises in this guide provide you with possible essay topics, as do the Discussion Questions in the Reader's Guide. Advanced students can come up with their own essay topics, as long as they are specific and compelling. Other ideas for essays are provided here.

For essays, students should organize their ideas around a thesis about the novel. This statement or thesis should be focused, with clear reasons supporting its conclusion. The thesis and supporting reasons should be backed by references to the text.

1. What are the different views of reading portrayed by Scout, Jem, and Atticus? How is reading linked to morality for each of these characters? Which view does the author advocate?
2. Lee writes of the Ewell property that "against the fence, in a line, were six chipped-enamel slop jars holding brilliant red geraniums, cared for as tenderly as if they belonged to Miss Maudie Atkinson" (p. 194). What do the flowers tell us about their keeper, Mayella Ewell? Are the geraniums a symbol? If so, why, and if not, why not?
3. A true gift is, in one sense, an unexpected blessing bestowed by a person—or even, perhaps, by fate. Some of them may be objects, while some may be things that cannot be seen but are no less important. Early in the novel, the children find a mysterious shiny package in the knothole of a live oak tree (p. 53). What gifts are given in *To Kill a Mockingbird*? Why might they be important to the unfolding of the story?
4. The Radley place undergoes a change in the course of the novel. At the beginning, we are told, "Inside the house lived a malevolent phantom" (p. 9). By the end, Scout fearlessly walks Boo up to his front porch. What change has taken place in Scout that allows her to walk with Boo?
5. Maudie Atkinson says, "Atticus Finch was the dearest shot in Maycomb County in his time" (p. 112). What lessons do the Finch children learn from the incident with the mad dog? Explain in detail, indicating how they change their understanding of their father. Is the mad-dog a symbol of some Maycomb citizens?
6. What does the visit to the Negro church teach Scout and Jem about black people in Maycomb? How is their culture different from the culture of white people the children know? How are the two connected?
7. At the novel's end, Scout says of Boo Radley, "...neighbors give in return. We never put back into the tree what we took out of it: we had given him nothing, and it made me sad" (p. 320). Is Scout right, that they gave nothing in return? Does this comment come from the adult-Scout narrator or the child-Scout narrator?

# Capstone Projects

Teachers may consider the ways in which these activities may be linked to other Big Read community events. Most of these projects could be shared at a local library, a student assembly, or a bookstore.

1. Invite your visual arts specialist to assist students. Draw a portrait of a favorite character in *To Kill a Mockingbird*. Other students can draw maps of Maycomb or illustrations of prominent buildings. Still others can draw something that we are never allowed to see in the novel: the inside of Boo Radley's house. Team with a local bookstore to display the visual art.
2. Parents' Night: Have students choose a dramatic scene from the novel and draft a script using Harper Lee's dialogue. Memorize the lines. Before each presentation, have a narrator explain the context of the scene. Then, have students act out the scene. After each scene, have a commentator explain why the students chose that particular scene.
3. Ask students to prepare a speech by Boo Radley. They should imagine what Boo might want to say about the town where he was raised—a subject on which he has been completely silent. They should use their imaginations, but also references to the novel. Have students give their speeches at a local bookstore or library.
4. Ask students to produce a scene in which they put one of the characters of *To Kill a Mockingbird* on trial. They can choose anyone they like whom they think is guilty. They should write the dialogue including characters who testify. The scene can be produced at a student assembly and include a discussion session afterward.
5. Explore the historical period of the 1930s by creating posters that provide in-depth information on what is happening in the following artistic communities: music and jazz, theater, visual arts, photography, and dance. Display these posters in the school or classroom.

## Biography: Harper Lee

Nelle Harper Lee was born on April 28, 1926, in Monroeville, Alabama. Her father, Amasa Coleman Lee, was a lawyer, newspaper editor, and state senator during her formative years. Harper Lee's childhood in a small Southern town decades before the triumph of the Civil Rights movement provided all the material she needed for her celebrated, and only, novel, *To Kill a Mockingbird*.

Though narrated by a child, *Mockingbird* was not a story Lee could have written without experience in the larger adult world. She studied at Huntingdon College, the University of Alabama (where she never finished a law degree), and at Oxford University in England. In 1950, she moved to New York City, where she worked as an airline reservation clerk. Convinced she had a story to tell about her own magical childhood, she moved to a cold-water apartment and, in earnest, took up the life of a struggling writer.

In 1957, her attempt to publish the novel failed. On the advice of an editor, she decided to turn what was a manuscript of short stories into a longer, more coherent narrative about the Depression-era South. She gained valuable inspiration when, in 1959, she traveled to Kansas with childhood friend Truman Capote (the inspiration for Dill in *Mockingbird*). There she helped Capote research *In Cold Blood*, a novel published to wide acclaim in 1966.

*To Kill a Mockingbird*, finally published in 1960, was awarded the Pulitzer Prize in 1961. The following year the book was adapted as a movie with an Academy Award-winning screenplay by Horton Foote. Virtually overnight Lee became a literary sensation. A resolution was passed in her honor by the Alabama legislature in 1961, and in 1966 she was named to the National Council of the Arts by President Lyndon Johnson.

In the last 40 years, Lee has received numerous honors, including several honorary university degrees. Most recently she was awarded the Los Angeles Public Library Literary Award in 2005.

Expectations notwithstanding, Lee has never published another book. Her entire published oeuvre consists of a brilliant novel and miscellaneous articles, mostly from the 1960s.

# The Great Depression

The 1929 stock market crash set into motion a series of events, plunging America into its greatest economic depression. By 1933, the country's gross national product had been nearly cut in half, and 16 million Americans were unemployed. Not until 1937 did the New Deal policies of President Franklin Roosevelt temper the catastrophe. This economic down-turn did not end until massive investment in national defense demanded by World War II.

The causes of the Depression were many, and still debated. High-spending in the 1920s created a gap preventing working class people from increasing their incomes. The trade policies of earlier administrations increased the cost of American goods abroad. Lines of credit were overextended, which fueled speculation on Wall Street. The crash that occurred on October 24, 1929 ("Black Thursday"), soon spread across the world, ruining European economies not fully recovered from World War I.

American writers and artists depicted the devastation in prose and pictures. John Steinbeck immortalized the plight of Oklahoma tenant farmers fleeing the Dust Bowl in *The Grapes of Wrath* (1939). James Agee's *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men* (1941) used the grim but dignified photographs of Walker Evans to illustrate the catastrophe in rural areas. Photographer Dorothea Lange, employed by the Farm Security Administration, documented in magazines and newspapers nationwide the reality that confronted American farmers.

Harper Lee experienced the Great Depression as a child in Monroeville, Alabama, and used her memory of it in *To Kill a Mockingbird*. "Maycomb county," she writes, "had recently been told that it had nothing to fear but fear itself" (p. 6), a reference to a famous speech by President Roosevelt. Walter Cunningham's father refused a WPA (Works Progress Administration) job, fearing what would come of his independence if he went on relief. And Bob Ewell, as Scout tells us, was "the only man I ever heard of who was fired from the WPA for laziness" (p. 284).

# The Civil Rights Movement

Civil rights are something most Americans take for granted today. But millions of Americans were long denied fundamental democratic rights: voting, freedom of movement, due process, and equal protection under the law. At the end of the Civil War, the U.S. government began passing constitutional amendments and civil rights legislation on everything from voting rights to the right to own property and appear in court. The civil rights movement in America really began as a newly freed African-American population demanded rights.

Well-intentioned federal law was obscured by the failure of Reconstruction in the 1870s. Southern states passed a variety of “Jim Crow” laws enforcing racial segregation in education, housing, transportation, and public facilities. Marriage between blacks and whites was forbidden. For almost 90 years following Reconstruction, poll taxes and literacy tests made voting all but impossible for African Americans.

A forceful, non-violent movement opposed Jim Crow. In 1909, W.E.B. Dubois co-founded the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), leading the 20th-century civil rights struggle. With opposition from the Ku Klux Klan, the civil rights movement struggled through the 1920s and 1930s, marred by race riots and lynching. Between 1882 and 1968, some 300 blacks were lynched in Alabama alone.

Slowly, the federal government and the courts endorsed the lead of the NAACP and other organizations. In 1954 the Supreme Court, in *Brown v. Board of Education*, ruled that “separate but equal” school facilities were unconstitutional, ordering integration in public schools. The next year Rosa Parks refused to give up her bus seat to a white person, leading to the Montgomery Bus Boycott. In the decade that followed, under the spiritual and political leadership of Martin Luther King, Jr., the movement for civil rights expanded, even if the path was hard and bloody. With the Civil Rights Act of 1964, the Voting Rights Act of 1965, and the Civil Rights Act of 1968, the civil rights of *all* Americans were established by law.

# Teaching Resources

## Printed Resources

Bloom, Harold, editor. *Harper Lee's To Kill a Mockingbird*. *Bloom's Modern Critical Interpretations*. (New York: Chelsea House, 1996).

Childress, Mark. "Looking for Harper Lee." *Southern Living*, (May 1997). pp. 148-50.

Erisman, Fred. "The Romantic Regionalism of Harper Lee." *Alabama Review*, No. 26, (April, 1973). pp. 122-136.

Going, William T. "Truman Capote: Harper Lee's Fictional Portrait of the Artist as an Alabama Child." *Alabama Review*, Vol. 42, No. 2. pp. 136-149.

Johnson, Claudia Durst. *Understanding To Kill a Mockingbird: A Student Casebook*. (New York: Greenwood, 1994).

Johnson, Claudia Durst. *To Kill a Mockingbird: Threatening Boundaries*. (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1994).

Shields, Charles J. *Mockingbird: A Portrait of Harper Lee*. (New York: Henry Holt, 2006).

## Web sites

<http://www.chebucto.ns.ca/Culture/HarperLee/>

A site that deals with every facet of Lee and her novel, including a biography, bibliography, and little known facts about her life and career.

[http://www.lausd.k12.ca.us/Belmont\\_HS/tkm/](http://www.lausd.k12.ca.us/Belmont_HS/tkm/)

A very detailed guide for student and teacher on idioms, vocabulary, and allusions in the novel. It was assembled by a high school teacher in Los Angeles.

<http://library.advanced.org/12111/>

A compendium of exercises, study tools, and links for both the novel and the film, the site is very useful but somewhat out of date.

# NCTE Standards

## National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) Standards\*

1. Students read a wide range of print and non-print texts to build an understanding of texts, of themselves, and of the cultures of the United States and the world; to acquire new information; to respond to the needs and demands of society and the workplace; and for personal fulfillment. Among these texts are fiction and nonfiction, classic and contemporary works.
2. Students read a wide range of literature from many periods in many genres to build an understanding of the many dimensions (e.g., philosophical, ethical, aesthetic) of human experience.
3. Students apply a wide range of strategies to comprehend, interpret, evaluate, and appreciate texts. They draw on their prior experience, their interactions with other readers and writers, their knowledge of word meaning and of other texts, their word identification strategies, and their understanding of textual features (e.g., sound-letter correspondence, sentence structure, context, graphics).
4. Students adjust their use of spoken, written, and visual language (e.g., conventions, style, vocabulary) to communicate effectively with a variety of audiences and for different purposes.
5. Students employ a wide range of strategies as they write and use different writing process elements appropriately to communicate with different audiences for a variety of purposes.
6. Students apply knowledge of language structure, language conventions (e.g., spelling and punctuation), media techniques, figurative language, and genre to create, critique, and discuss print and non-print texts.
7. Students conduct research on issues and interests by generating ideas and questions, and by posing problems. They gather, evaluate, and synthesize data from a variety of sources (e.g., print and non-print texts, artifacts, people) to communicate their discoveries in ways that suit their purpose and audience.
8. Students use a variety of technological and information resources (e.g., libraries, databases, computer networks, video) to gather and synthesize information and to create and communicate knowledge.
9. Students develop an understanding of and respect for diversity in language use, patterns, and dialects across cultures, ethnic groups, geographic regions, and social roles.
10. Students whose first language is not English make use of their first language to develop competency in the English language arts and to develop understanding of content across the curriculum.
11. Students participate as knowledgeable, reflective, creative, and critical members of a variety of literacy communities.
12. Students use spoken, written, and visual language to accomplish their own purposes (e.g., for learning, enjoyment, persuasion, and the exchange of information).

\*This guide was developed with NCTE Standards and State Language Arts Standards in mind. Use these standards to guide and develop your application of the curriculum.



**“There is one way in this country in which all men are created equal—there is one human institution that makes a pauper the equal of a Rockefeller, the stupid man the equal of an Einstein, and the ignorant man the equal of any college president. That institution, gentlemen, is a court. It can be the Supreme Court of the United States or the humblest J.P. court in the land, or this honorable court which you serve. Our courts have their faults, as does any human institution, but in this country our courts are great levelers, and in our courts all men are created equal.”**

*—from To Kill a Mockingbird*

**“The one thing that  
doesn’t abide by  
majority rule is a  
person’s conscience.”**

—from *To Kill a Mockingbird*

**NATIONAL  
ENDOWMENT  
FOR THE ARTS**



*The Big Read is an initiative of the National Endowment for the Arts designed to restore reading to the center of American culture. The NEA presents The Big Read in partnership with the Institute of Museum and Library Services and in cooperation with Arts Midwest. The Big Read brings together partners across the country to encourage reading for pleasure and enlightenment.*

**A great nation deserves great art.**



*The Big Read for military communities is made possible by*

